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# Position Statement

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## HB 5912 – No Net Loss of State Hunting Lands

*The Sierra Club OPPOSES this bill in its current form.*

### Issue Background

Michigan has more public lands than any state east of the Mississippi river. The vast majority of land owned by the State and managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is open to hunting. According to the Sierra Club's research, exceptions may include certain campgrounds, specially designated areas in wildlife refuges, boat access areas and limited wildlife sanctuary areas. An other reason for restricting hunting on public land is driven by a required 450 foot safety zone around privately owned lands and/or structures. According to the 2003-2007 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, any individual privately held in-holding may reduce hunting access by 16 acres.

HB 5912 would require the DNR to assure that there is no net loss of hunting lands under its control. It would also require DNR staff to annually report to the legislature on the acreage of lands restricted to hunting and lands opened to hunting to make up for those restricted.

### Sierra Club Perspective

*There are a number of reasons the Sierra Club opposes this bill in its current form:*

- *Safety of the public must always come first, even if it results in an overall loss of hunting lands. The 450 foot safety zone must be preserved, along with all existing safety rules.*
- *This bill appears to treat hunting as a higher priority activity than other public land uses. Existing public lands which are restricted to hunting must also experience no net loss. The bill requires clarification to ensure that lands designated as restricted to hunting (such as wildlife sanctuaries) would not be sacrificed and opened to hunting to make up for lost hunting lands. While hunting lands are important, there are far more non-hunters than hunters who use public lands in Michigan. (A discussion with the bill sponsor indicated that he is open to amending the bill to address this issue.)*
- *Given Michigan's existing budget problems, this bill puts an undue paperwork and reporting burden on the DNR, an agency that is already under-funded and under-staffed.*
- *Actions by the DNR (such as land sales or swaps) and actions by the public (such as new development) can both reduce hunting access. Private actions are not under the control of the DNR. For example, should a new subdivision be built adjacent to a state park, the 450 foot safety zone could significantly reduce hunting acreage. Requiring the DNR to acquire or designate new hunting lands to make up for those lost because of the development could place new financial burdens on the DNR.*